

## AN IDYL OF A RAMBLER.

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When Man was banished from the Garden of Eden he received the dread sentence that "the ground should be cursed for his sake," and that "in sorrow should he eat of it all the days of his life." But we are all aware that this language, though true in its general application, is not to be understood in a literal and exclusive sense. Man was told that the earth should "bring forth thorns and thistles," but it also produces flowers to gratify and fruits to nourish him. The Infinite Being has said that "the days of our life shall be marked with sorrow," and they are; but the afflictions to which we are subject are attended with blessed antidotes. Moral sources of enjoyment are given us, as fruits and flowers, for the Soul, and the teachings of interest should lead us to consider with attention those gifts which enlarge the capacities of the spirit, and call forth wonderment at the mighty workings of all bounteous Nature. For instance, who is insensible to the beauties of the rising or the setting of the summer sun? Who can behold the moonbeams reflected from silent river, lake or sea, and not feel happy in the sight? None, I believe, in early life. But, when hardened in the ways of the world and of man; when the chief end pursued is the accumulation of wealth, acquisition of power, or pursuit of pleasure, then mankind loses sight of the beauties of Nature. Were the inherent love of them cherished by early education, how seldom would it be destroyed or become dormant, as it too often is. But the student of Nature finds in every sphere of existence a means of rational enjoyment—a pleasure so fascinating when grasped at, that the mind for the time forgets the ills of life, and the glories of Eden spring up in imagination through the mists of troubles; for in every bank and woodland, and running stream, in every bird among the boughs, and every cloud above his head, stores of interest abound, which enable him to

forget awhile himself and man, and all the cares of life, in the inexhaustible beauty and glory of Nature, and of the God who made and controls her.

Let us walk, side by side, in imagination, with a naturalist in his daily ramble; let us blend our mind with his, to receive those impressions which he feels, to share the train of reflection that comes crowding on his mind, as the affinities of objects lead his ideas to wander from the leafiness of the Temperate to the exuberant foliage of the Torrid Zone. We approach a woodland; how inspiring are the odors that breathe from the upland turf, from the rock-hung flower, from the hoary and solemn pine. Deep, and dark, and still, are the shadows of the surrounding trees and bushes. The green leaves seem to infuse into our hearts a portion of their happiness as "they clap their hands in glee," and the joyous birds make melody all around. Here let us pause and gather a single blade of grass, and examine for a minute quietly, its narrow sword-shaped strip of fluted green. Ruskin says of this: "Nothing, as it seems, there, of goodness or beauty. A very little strength, and a very little tallness, and a few delicate long lines meeting in a point; not a perfect point, either, but blunt and unfinished; by no means a creditable or apparently much cared for example of Nature's workmanship; made, as it seems, only to be trodden on to-day, and 'to-morrow to be cast into the oven.'" And yet, think of it well, and judge, whether of all the gorgeous flowers that beam in summer air and of all strong and goodly trees, pleasant to the eyes, or yielding fruit, stately palm and pine, strong ash and oak, scented citron, or burdened vine, there be any by man so deeply loved, by God so highly graced, as that narrow point of feeble grass. And well does it fulfil its mission. Consider what we owe merely to the meadow grass, to the covering of the dark ground by that glorious enamel, by the companies of those soft and countless spears. The fields: follow forth but for a little time, the thought of all we ought to recognize in these words. All spring and summer is in them; the walks by silent paths, the rests in noonday heat; the joy of herds and flocks, the sunlight falling in emerald streaks and soft blue shadows, where else it would have struck upon the dark mould or scorching dust; pastures beside the babbling brooks; soft banks and knolls of hills, thymy slopes of down, overlooked by the blue line of the distant sea-crisp lawns, all

dim with early dew, or smooth in evening warmth of sunshine ; all these are summed up in the simple words—"The Fields."

Whatever course our thoughts may take, we must remember that there is no plant, however humble, no flower or weed that springeth from the earth, but is an organized and living mystery. The secrets of the abyss are not more inscrutable than the work that is wrought in its hidden germ. The goings on of the Heavens are not more incomprehensible than the growth of a simple plant, as it waves in the summer breeze. The functions that constitute its growth, flower and fruit, the organs and affinities by which every part receives the material that answers its purpose, who can unfold or explain them? As the fruit of one year falls, the seed of centuries of growth is sown. By the mechanism of Nature, the stocking of the earth with every kind of growth, from the oak of a thousand years, to the weed of to-day, is carried on. The acorn falls into moist earth, and is trodden in by man or beast, to become an oak in course of years, whose timber may resound to and tremble under the roar of warfare on the ocean ; berries are carried by birds, and dropped on ledges of rock in any handful of soil that may be there, to sprout and germinate and grow, and to reproduce in their turn, seeds for future growth. Winged seeds, such as those of the thistle, the dandelion, etc., are elevated by the winds till they stop in some favoured places ; hooked seeds, such as are familiarly called "cleavers" or "burrs," entangled on the dress of the passer-by, or hanging to the hair or fleecy coverings of animals, may be carried miles away, and find their resting place in even other lands.

Whilst men, with due care, put seeds into the ground by millions, Nature plants and sows on a larger scale, surpassing man while he is busy, and going on with her work while he is sleeping or making holiday. For every tree that falls thousands are sown ; for every flower that fades millions are provided. What we do with pains and care in our flower beds, is done silently all over the islands and continents of our globe. New life is provided before decay begins.

How beautifully are the lights and shadows thrown abroad, and the fine transparent haze diffused over the valleys and plains. The shadows play all day long at silent games of beauty ; everything is double if it stands in light. The tree has an unveiled and muffled self, lying darkly along the ground ; the slender stems of flowers,

golden rod, wayside asters, meadow daisies and rare lilies, cast forth a dim and tremulous line of shadow, that lies long all the morning, shortening till noon, and creeping out again all afternoon, until the sun descends yon western horizon. Meanwhile, the clouds drop shadows like anchors, that reach the ground, but will not hold: every browsing creature, every fitting bird, every unconscious traveler writes itself along the ground in dim shadow. And, speaking of the clouds, let us pause a few moments while we look with admiration at the ever changing variety and beauty; at the gorgeous scenery of summer cloudland, the exquisite variety of tints, the graceful motions, and the changing shadows which flit over hill and dale. The finest dyes and most skilful looms can never equal the tapestry with which God decorates our earthly abode. These are pictures shut up in no secluded gallery, to be seen only by the rich, but they are spread alike before the lowly and the lofty, in the city, and in the remotest solitudes, where all may drink in their beauty, and discern the wisdom and skill of Him who made them. Even the child, as he gazes dreamily at the tiny white speck floating far away in the blue ether, has his little soul filled with interest, and when he sees dark masses of vapor come rolling up slowly and majestically, fold after fold, from the distant horizon, his imagination will transform those fantastic shapes into gigantic snow-capped mountains, towering peak upon peak, until he almost longs for wings to fly and explore their far-off summits. But, how comparatively few, children or adults, ever pause to give themselves a matter of fact explanation of the actual formation of clouds, the unerring laws of their creation or dispersion, or the vast beneficent part they take in the economy of Nature. The question may be asked why there are on some days clouds, and again on others none? The answer is, there are clouds always, although not always visible, or to be more correct, the material of which clouds are made is always there; for if the air is warmed by the shooting down of the sun's rays for days past, it holds in solution, invisible, the vapor it has imbibed. But let that air begin to cool, and it parts with its mass of moisture; in other words it deposits it in the shape of white vapor, being no longer able to retain it in an invisible form. This delicate little cloud, or mass of vapor, however, is of very precarious existence. One ray of bright sunshine, the faintest return of heat, would send it

back again from a state of visible vapor to invisible moisture. Its outward form would be gone, and although we know that its essence would still subsist, indeed, could never be destroyed, yet its apparent existence would be ended. It would thus vanish like many an infant at its very entrance into life, before accomplishing any specific purpose of its being; but, again, like the infant, it is only the outward form which sustains annihilation. But heat is not the only thing by which clouds are affected. Life is ever changing with them as with mortals; they are liable at any moment to be whirled into the most fantastic shapes by every fickle wind that passes. If the temperature of the atmosphere continues to lower, the delicate gossamer-like vapor (beautifully compared by Lamartine to the world's incense floating upwards to the Throne of God), will resolve itself into large dark masses of rolling clouds, and the mass of vapor, no longer able to poise itself in the air, descends to earth in grateful refreshing showers, and perhaps in the bosom of the cloud now passing overhead, are liquid treasures sucked up from swamps of Florida, to go and shower fertility and wealth on the plains of the far off West. Winter and summer "the clouds drop fatness." But they have other offices to perform, besides those of merely dispensing showers, of producing the rains, and of weaving mantles of snow for the protection of our fields. They have other commandments to fulfil, which, though less obvious, are not therefore the less benign in their influences or the less worthy of our notice. They moderate the extremes of heat and of cold; they mitigate the climate. They spread themselves out, preventing radiation from the earth and keeping it warm; at another time they interpose between it and the sun; they screen it from his scorching rays and protect the tender plants from his heat, the land from the drought. Having performed this, they are evaporated and given up to the sunbeam and the winds, to be borne on their wings, away to other regions which stand in need of their offices. And here I would say that I know of no subject more fit for profitable thought on the part of the knowledge-seeking student, than that afforded by the atmosphere. Of all parts of the physical machinery, of all the contrivances in the mechanism of the universe, the atmosphere with its uses and adaptations appears to be the most wonderful, sublime and beautiful. In its construction, the perfection of knowledge and

wisdom is involved, and, to turn to Holy Writ, how appropriately does Job burst forth in laudation of the latter, as God's handiwork, in the xxviii. chapter.

The sighing of the wind as it sways the branches of the forest, which now bend before the summer zephyr like courtiers doing homage, now bend before the fury of the storm like strong men in adversity, sounds to our naturalist as angels' whispers in its gentleness, or in its fury as the voice of One mightier than Manoah's son speaking in anger—"The voice of One who breaketh the cedars, yea, the cedars of Lebanon." But he will tell you this Nature's music is never still, never silent, though often varied; for each tree has its part—the surging of the oak, the whispering of the elm, the rustling of the beech, the laugh of the birch, the sighing of the willow, the moaning of the hemlock, the dirge of the cyprus. The pine alone remains constant to melody throughout the year. Every breeze that touches the pine in any season of the year wakes up myriads of fairy harps which, united, set the air trembling with the most moving harmony that Nature affords—the harp-music of Nature's orchestra. Even the aspect of the woodland itself: if thick with tangled underbrush, the unexplored impervious forests of the Amazon rise up to the imagination; or, if thick with fern and grass, it recalls visions of Australian fern-trees and wattles—fern-trees, now the only corresponding and connecting link to the fossil plants of the coal formation, beneath whose heavy coverts the Saurian monsters roamed, the giants in the earth of those days; monsters extinct and passed away, leaving their epitaph in stone to be deciphered only by the researches of science centuries after their existence.

Should the road lead by or near a pond, our naturalist shrinks not from the wet and swampy ground surrounding it, for the forget-me-not is there, with blossom blue as the sky of Heaven, and its golden eye bright as Hope itself; there is the calamus, or sweet-scented flag, the iris, the bulrush, heavy and swaying in the wind, the water-lily, rivalling in its blossom the magnolia of the southern climes, and harboring under its broad leaves the pike and the perch, the bass and the pickerel, those favorites of meek Walton's followers. The delicate whites and pinks and yellows and blues of the aquatic blossoms—how bewitching are they in the sunlight! Adhering to the pond weed, or slowly drawing their homes along with



them, are visible the water snails, amongst which is conspicuous the Planorbis, or Coil Shell, a representative left us of the Ammonite, one of the most universal fossils of the secondary rocks ; shells whose proportions have dwindled down from their colossal size in days of yore, when their circumference equalled that of a wheel, to that of an ordinary small coin, contrasting in their diminution the present pigmy race of man with his predecessors. Here we see the dragon fly disporting on its gauzy wings, itself glittering with blue and green flashing back the sunshine, now hovering poised above the surface of the pool as if desirous of telling its kindred larvæ, who still remain below, and from one of which it lately sprung, the glorious beauty hereafter awaiting them when their transformation takes place ; but the watery element defies the advance of insect life, and between them there is a great gulf fixed. Fancy may lead us to picture to ourselves the Grub, preparatory to bursting his prison house by the water side and rising on glittering wings into the summer air, promising tidings to its fellows of the state it is about to enter, and the longings of those left behind to hear something of that state, dimly fancied by them, but unknown. We could fancy him returning amidst the transports of his wildest flights, ever and anon, to the precincts of that watery world which had once been the only world to him ; and thus divided, yet near, parted, yet united by love, he hovers about the barrier that lies between them, darting over the crystal water in the rapture of his new life.

Let us scoop up a handful of water from the pond, and carefully examine it. Our naturalist will tell us that there is in it a creature with neither arms nor legs, properly so called, but which catches animals more lively than itself, and twice its own size ; with no eyes, yet loving the sunshine : whose stomach can be turned inside out, apparently without hurting it, and which, if cut in two, will not die, but each part grow into a perfect creature. To inexperienced eyes it looks like a tiny piece of green sewing silk, about a quarter of an inch long, and a little untwisted at one end. This, however, is really a set of delicate limbs placed round the thicker end of the slender body of the little Hydra (for such is the name it goes by). These tentacles, or feelers, float in the water like fairy fishing lines. Little creatures, invisible to our unaided sight, that have been frisking round full of life and activity, are seized by them, and one tentacle

after another being wound around its prey, the process of digestion takes place. When we laugh at the idea of two or three Hydras growing out of one, if severed, we are told the reason is that the principle of life is diffused equally in all its parts; that any part can live without the rest, and, like the cutting of a plant having life in itself, it can grow into a perfect creature.

Journeying onward, he tells us of another animalcule provided with two hairy wheels upon its head, whirling continually around, producing a strong current towards its mouth placed between them, carrying in all lesser objects floating near, and like the rotary wheels of a steamboat, carrying him onward, unless desirous of a rest, he grasps with his prehensile tail some friendly water plant. With still greater surprise we hear that these animalcules each have shells, which in some places during the course of centuries, have formed thick layers of white fine earth, so fine, that on the shores of a lake near Urnea, in Sweden, the peasants have for many years mixed with their flour this so-called "mountain meal." When we come to think that the vast thickness of the chalk cliffs were all formed from the deposition of animalcular exuviae, surely the mind of man is inadequate to count the myriads of ages through which this process was going on, a process still silently and invisibly working in the depth and darkness of the Atlantic.

Skirting the pond, which has thus engrossed our attention, we may see rocks now rising up precipitously in rugged masses, now sloping quietly to the water's edge, partly clothed with lichens and moss, here covering the stone to the depth of several inches, there clustering around some bare patch of rock. From this we learn how the first accumulation of soil took place, when order was first produced from chaos; soil, which year by year increasing from the decomposition of those rudiments of vegetable life, afforded depth and life for plants of a higher order and larger growth, to be in turn succeeded by a more luxuriant vegetation adapted for the support of animal life.

As we gaze upon the distant mountain range, what thoughts come crowding on our minds. How solemnly and majestically they raise their rugged peaks to heaven. Now, in token of their royalty crowned with a diadem of clouds, and now with every one of their cliffs gleaming in the sunlight like the pictures of a dream. For ages they have held communion with the mysteries of the midnight sky.



The earliest beams of the morning have bathed them in living light, and theirs too have been the kisses of departing day. Man and his empire have arisen and decayed, but they have remained unchanged, a perpetual mockery. Upon their summits Time has never claimed dominion. There, as of old, does the eagle teach her brood to fly, and the wild beast prowls after his prey. There do the waterfalls still leap and shout on their way to the dells below, even as when the tired hunter, centuries ago, bent him to quaff the liquid element. There, still, does the rank grass rustle in the breeze, and the pine, and the cedar, and the hemlock take part in the howling of the gale. Upon man alone falls the curse of Time. Nature has never sinned, therefore her glory is immortal. In such scenery we can understand the full meaning of the words—"The hills stand round about Jerusalem," and their unchanging aspect whispers into the ear of man that he is but the moth which flutters in the noontide air.

Again, the voice of Nature is perpetually singing the saddened strain, "farewell." It is in the sway of the boughs overhead, and by presentiment, when they shall stand bare and stark; the brook ripples already to think how soon it will be choked by frost into a subterranean gurgle; the mountains are beautifying themselves before they lay off their robes of beauty for a season; even the sea, with its gentle rise and fall, and swelling breast, is telling how its line of beach will soon be driven snow, and its sands no longer warm. What is there in life or Nature that says "farewell" more punctually and more sweetly than Nature herself. In Spring she sends the early flowers, her children, to foretell her coming, and in Autumn, instead of merely disappearing, she summons all her children and all her works, to stand in full array and make their tender adieu. The order of departure reverses that of coming. As Summer goes, she makes this presentation of herself and hers; then she sends the rest away one by one, lingering herself until the last in our memories of the bygone season.

There are certain things in Nature in which we can discern a human sympathy, a veritable kinship; and if we dismiss these things by referring them to a general fixed law, then the sympathy and the friendship are merely transferred to the law. How persistently and ingeniously she thrusts herself upon our senses, claiming our notice and beseeching our sympathy. There is nothing

unsightly of all the unsightly things in the world which she does not cover with her fresh growths ; she greens over battle and ruin and wipes off the blackening of fire. We do our best to shut her out in our cities, but it is all in vain. She sends her little blades of grass to push themselves up beside the flagstone ; her ivy climbs the stone churches and castles, hiding the ravages of time, and her trees are the fullest representation of herself ; the agent of Him at whose fiat the world emerged from chaos.

But, to resume our walk : Abounding everywhere, and full of interest, are the birds we meet with in the deep solitudes of the woods ; the lugubrious cawing of the crow grates upon the ear with hollow voice, which has for ages been an object of evil omen to the credulous and the ignorant ; the monotonous sound of the distant wood-pecker, "tapping the bark of the hollow beech tree," or making the woods resound with his notes of laughter, takes up the tale ; the bluebird, the titmouse, or "chicadee," that happy restless easy-going creature, who scorns to leave us for the snow of winter, and picks up a scanty living round the outhouses of the farm ; the finch tribe with their never ceasing cry, make the very copse alive with their melody ; whilst the bobolink on the wing, surveying the grassy plains below him, chants forth a jingling melody of short variable notes, with such confusion and rapidity that it appears as if a whole colony of birds were tuning their notes for some great gathering in Nature's concert hall. And, as he is so well known a bird, I cannot refrain from dwelling on his character a little while. Rivalling the European lark, he is the happiest bird of spring ; he comes amidst the pomp and fragrance of the season, his life seems all sunshine, all song. He is to be found in the soft bosoms of the freshest and sweetest meadows, and is most in song when the clover is in bloom. Near by we may see a tyrant kingbird, poised on the topmost branch of some veteran tree, who now and then dashes down, assassin-like, upon some homebound honey-laden bee, and then with a smack of his bill, resume his predatory watch. Over the pool, the swifts, the martens and the swallows, seem to vie with each other in acrobatic flight ; now skimming the surface of the water, now making with a touch of the wing a scarcely perceptible ripple.

Besides the birds, flicker and flit hither and thither the butterflies, small and large, white, grave and gay ; grasshoppers are noisy

beside long stretches of green paths ; improvident fellows who sing all through the livelong summer day, unmindful and heedless of coming storms and winter's stern array ; and who would think, when looking on the painted butterfly, flashing its gaudy colors in the sunlight, that a few weeks ago it was a grovelling worm, an emblem of destruction, a caterpillar. How wondrous the change ; how beauteous the transformation. How typical of the spirit of man, who, fettered to earth in the flesh, shall one day emerge from the chrysalis of death, and wing its flight to the Bowers of Eden.

Bounding through the highest tree tops in fearless leaps, light and graceful in form, with bright black eyes, and nimbleness in every movement, the squirrel enlivens the scene, who, after scrutinizing around some mossgrown branch for the disturber of his haunts, hies away from our gaze, with a defiant chattering that seems to say, "catch me if you can," to his nest in some hollow limb, where his booty of acorns, chestnuts or beech nuts is stored up for winter use ; and, we think, when following his nimble movements, how some of our species might relieve our charitable societies of many of their cares if they would only take this provident little fellow as an example. But the lengthening shadows warn us to retrace our steps ere the dark pall of night settles over mountain, valley, tree and stream. The fogs are rising in the meadows ; a thin, white line of vapor marks, with well-defined outline, the course of some stream flowing through them. Long before we reach home the curtain is raised that concealed the celestial host ; those fires that glow forever, and yet are not quenched. There they move as they moved and shone when "the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy." It was the same blue spangled dome on high above old Rome, when she rioted in all her magnificence and luxury. The "Shepherds who watched their flocks by night," the Magi, whose knowledge of the heavenly host was more enlarged than any others of their time, were warned to study that living page for a light to guide them to the expected Messiah. The Arab, as he travelled the boundless fields of sand with his trusty camel, the "ship of the desert," trusted of old to those burning orbs, for they alone were his chart and his compass. Beyond the grasp of poor frail man, they light him from the cradle to the sepulchre. Their beams are shed upon his monument, until that, too, has crumbled away, and no token

remains to point to the spot where his ashes lie. Could a voice be heard from their blue home, doubtless it would speak of a race that passed from this continent long ere the canvas of Columbus was furled on these shores ; a race that preceded the Indian : a people whose remains are yet among us, but whose history lies deep in oblivion. All on earth has changed, but the glorious heavens remain unchanged ; sun, moon, planet and satellite, stars and constellations, galaxy and nebulae, still bear witness to the power, the wisdom and the love which placed them of old, and still sustains them where they are.

And now, our ramble over, we feel we have associated ourselves more closely with Nature, and her mighty Master, God. The materials with which that eternal power writes His name may vary, but the style of the handwriting is the same. And whether in illuminated characters he paints it in the field, or in the starry alphabet bids it flame forth from the face of the firmament : whether He works in the curious mosaic of a shell, or inscribes it in Hebrew letters on tables of stone, devotion recognizes its Heavenly Father's hand, and admires with reverence His matchless autograph.

In conclusion, let me impress upon the minds of all, how everything in Nature daily speaks to us in the plainest language, points out to us in its every phase something yet to come ; a something yet unknown, a mighty hereafter.

As the swallows homeward fly, their young brood raised, their summer work accomplished, instinct points out to them an unknown land to which to betake themselves from the chills and storms and tempests of winter. Something, we know not what, tells them this is not their rest. As the leaves fall off withered and sere, having done their work in Nature's mighty laboratory, the tree lies dormant for a time, but only to gain strength to burst forth in fresh beauty at a future time ; as the seed is committed to the ground, a dry, shrivelled object, to all appearance destitute of life, its future as the plant is provided for by Nature's hand ; as the sun goes down behind the mountains, or is shrouded behind cloud, its light is hidden but for a time, to burst forth again resplendent. As the river flows travelling onward to mix its waters in the unknown depth of ocean, leaving as it were forever the hills from whence it sprung, it is but to assume the form of vapour to replenish those springs. As the reed-

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bird builds its nest, a home for its little ones yet unborn, an unknown sweet voice of kindness bids it, she knows not why, thus look to the future. Yes, the river is rushing forward, the clouds are hurrying onward, the winds are sweeping past, because here is not their rest. Ask the river ; ask the clouds ; ask the winds where they go to. Another land ! Ask the great sun as he descends out of sight, where he goes to. Another land ! And when the appointed time shall come, man also must go ; where ? To that other land to which those voices of Nature have all along directed him : into the presence of Nature's God.